

Tell Tale Signs  
II Peter 2:13-16

In 1460, Pope Pius II wrote a scathing letter to Cardinal Borgia of Spain loathing the wild orgies that the cardinal held. Even in spite of his open and brazen wickedness he advanced in office and in 1492 purchased the papacy, calling himself Pope Alexander VI. The older he got the more sinful were his practices. It is said that he always kept a stable of women.

He had an illegitimate daughter who was even more wicked than he was. Her brother became a cardinal who mixed church work with immorality and murder. Additional scandal broke out as news sifted through the Vatican. The gossip was that the Pope was engaging in incest with his illegitimate daughter and that she had become pregnant by him.

Watching in the shadows of the Vatican was a young monk by the name of Martin Luther who would in time challenge the church with his 95 Theses and be the impetus of the Reformation.

Throughout church history there have always been examples of good and bad clergy. Even in the current days in which we live there is no end of scandals because of bad pastors. Many have blackened the name of the church and Christ.

The church has always had its Alexanders and Luthers, it's Jim Bakkers and Billy Grahams. It was no different in the early days of the church as Peter wrote to warn about the allurements of those who claim to be Christ following teachers only to find that they have an ulterior motive for their teaching.

With plenty of cable channels to choose from it seems that anybody can buy a spot on a station or even get your own channel. There are a lot of religious charlatans out there proclaiming their version of the gospel. Add to that the voluminous

amount of religious books that are available. Just about anybody can get anything published, so how do you know if the book you pick up at the airport or in the checkout line at the grocery store or at the book store is biblically true? But television and bookstores are limited in reach. Then there is the internet where anybody can buy a domain or start a blog and claim to be speaking from God.

This morning we are looking at II Peter 2:13-16. If you are wondering why we are skipping verses 10b-12 in our verse by verse study we looked at those verses when considering vs. 1-3. You can go to our church website [www.fhartland.org](http://www.fhartland.org) if you want to hear the message or get the notes. On the left side of the page click on sermons and then scroll down to July 2.

I want to consider just two points in the message. What Scripture teaches can help us discern between false and faithful teachers. It can help us identify their character.

The character of false teachers

The character of faithful teachers

## I. THE CHARACTER OF FALSE TEACHERS

The character of false teachers is something we have touched on in previous messages but we come back to it today because how someone behaves always stems from what they believe and what someone believes is what they teach. As my college Lit. teacher used to say "Literature is a repetitively selective series of concretions revealing a value scale." Whether oral or written, what you write or teach is what you believe and what you truly believe will shape your character.

Since they had a false view of Christ they had a false doctrine. How do we know that?

Peter says that what they believed about Christ was evident.

In Matthew 7:16 Jesus stated in the Sermon on the Mount that "by their fruits you will know them."

We know an apple tree by its fruit.  
 We know a pear tree by its fruit.  
 We know a false teacher by his fruit, first with the kind of faith they have.

#### A. Their Faith

Look back at verse 1.

Peter begins by noting their doctrine is false. Let me say again that what you believe shapes your conduct and values.

##### 1. Their doctrine is false – v. 1

He states that there are going to be false teachers among them. There will be teachers who say they are teaching the truth but who in fact are teaching what is false. They make what they teach sound real, but it's meant to deceive. It is not true, it is error, and it is misleading.

Perhaps you have heard some well-meaning Christian make this statement: "God helps those who help themselves." That is perhaps one of the most quoted phrases that is not found in the Bible, yet many say it is. Usually credited to Ben Franklin from *Poor Richard's Almanac* the English version actually originated with Algernon Sydney in 1698 in an article he wrote titled *Discourses Concerning Government*. Even before him Aesop included it in his fable Hercules and the Waggoner. In the story a waggoner gets stuck in the mud and he calls out to Hercules to help him. Hercules told the man to get up and put his shoulder to the cart because the gods help those who help themselves. It is the theology of self-reliance or as one professor put it sola bootstrapsis. Pull up your own boot straps.

Many Christians have bought that theology that God expects us to change first after which only then will He help out. Some even apply this to salvation that God expects us to do our part first in reforming before He will do His part in saving.

False teaching is almost as old as humanity. It

began when Satan deceived Eve by questioning God's Word by asking "Has God really said?"

Acts 17:11 says that the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because they searched the Scriptures. Know Scripture so you will be able to discern when someone teaches error.

Let me just mention again something else that gives their false teaching away. It's done in secret. They will slip or creep in without anyone noticing. The term was used to refer to someone who tried to fool a judge. They are wolves in sheepskin. Once in they introduce destructive heresies. What they teach will bring utter ruin. It's used to describe the final and eternal judgment that will come on the wicked. What they teach will lead people down a path to eternal destruction.

Now, what else do we see about their faith? He says that they even deny the Lord who bought them.

##### 2. Their denial is flagrant – v. 1

It is glaringly bad. In verse 1 we read that they "even deny the sovereign Lord." The word "even" is a conjunction joining what he just said with what he is about to say. He just said that they secretly introduce destructive heresies. The reason they teach such heresy is because they deny Christ. The word "deny" is a strong word speaking of rejection, refusal or unwillingness. These false teachers at some point heard the truth of the gospel and yet or still willfully rejected it, refusing to accept it.

Hebrews 11:24 uses it to speak of Moses refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Peter uses it to say that these false teachers rejected the authority of Christ. They refuse to accept Jesus Christ and His sovereignty, the very one who bought them, the one who died for their sin.

There are growing numbers of people who refuse to believe the evidence that the holocaust ever happened even in spite of testimonies of those who

are still alive and lived through it.

Some scientists believe that the earth is flat. They deny the evidence.

These false teachers denied Christ.

So if you are uncertain about someone's teaching, ask them what they believe about Christ and how someone is saved. A false teacher will deny Him. Ask a Mormon what they believe about Christ and they will tell you that He is just a god (little g) and that anyone can become a god.

Ask a Jehovah's Witness about Christ and they will tell you He is Michael the Archangel and that His sacrifice did nothing to atone for sin.

Ask a Muslim about Christ and they will tell you He was not divine, only a prophet or messenger.

Ask a Buddhist about Christ and they will tell you He was not divine, but certainly enlightened.

False teachers and teachings will deny the deity of Christ among many other things about Him. Their denial is flagrant. In verse 10 notice their derision is fierce.

### 3. Their derision is fierce – v. 10a

We learned something else last week about their faith. They despise authority. They refuse to have Christ rule over their lives. They don't want His lordship over them to obey His commands. If they deny Christ, they deny His Word. If they despise Christ, they despise His Word. If they don't have anything good to say about Christ then they are false teachers. Their faith is in themselves and not in Christ.

### B. Their Fruit – vs. 13-16

If what they believe is false, then what they teach is false. If what they teach is false then how they live will also not line up with Scripture. Peter highlights two areas of clear and observable deficiency in character that should reveal their fruit. Jesus said by their fruit you will know them. The fruit of their character will reveal their true heart.

1. The fruit of gratification is sensual  
“Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight.”

The KJV uses the term “revel” and the NIV says “carouse”. It literally means to drink up entirely or to drink much alcohol and to do so with others in a way that is a merry drinking party or loud celebration. Roman historians write that debauchery was tolerated so long as it was discreetly done at night, but these false teachers didn't hold back as they did their sinful acts in broad daylight. They had no shame. It would be like the time in the Old Testament when Absalom pitched a tent on the top of the palace and in broad daylight for all Jerusalem to see he slept with his father's concubines.

Verse 13 continues by noting that they are blots and blemishes or stains that can't be removed. If it wasn't bad enough that they committed their sensual activity in the daytime they did so while enjoying a feast with Christians. Some scholars suggest that this is referring to the love feasts that churches would hold that also included communion.

Bruce Barton writes “In one of the greatest hypocritical acts, they attended the sacred feasts designed to promote love and unity among believers, while at the same time they lived and spoke in opposition to Christ.”

Paul was very direct with the Corinthians (11:27) in his first letter to them when he told them that anyone who took communion in an unworthy manner was guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ. Yet here were these false teachers who were using this time of Christian celebration to openly engage in sensual activity and to encourage others to do the same.

Verse 14 adds that they had “eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning.” That means that they looked at women lustfully. The only thing on their minds was fulfilling their sensual desires. It was

continuous and habitual. It suggests that they could not stop. Gratifying their sensual desires was an addiction. But since they deny Christ and despise His authority, they don't care that Jesus taught in Matthew 5:28 that even the act of thinking lustfully about a woman is considered adultery. The obvious intent of these false teachers is to gratify their sinful desires.

## 2. The fruit of greed is self-indulgent

Everything they do, their actions, their motives is self-serving. Verse 14 says that "they are experts in greed." They trained themselves to be greedy and to get away with it. We saw back in verse 3 that greed was used to exploit others. Greed is that insatiable desire for more. Webster's puts it into perspective with this definition: the desire for more than one needs or deserves.

I read this week about a pastor with a multimillion dollar salary with a housing allowance over \$200,000. I asked our tax guy what is a safe figure for a housing allowance and he said I wouldn't go any higher than what you have budgeted. This guy was more than 10 times that amount.

Greed consumed these false teachers. Every year as a Board we go through the process of working out a budget to propose for the next fiscal year. The Board knows how very reluctant I am to talk about salary. I'm glad I get paid, but salary is not something I enjoy talking about. I once took a call from a woman, not part of the church I was serving at the time, who ranted about how pastors were filthy rich and how I probably had a couple helicopters.

Peter cites a fourth Old Testament example in the person of Balaam. We won't take time to look back there but you can read Numbers 22-25. Israel was tromping around the desert and the Moabites grew a bit concerned because of how large a nation they were. They didn't want to get swallowed up like

the Amorites, so King Balak sent a group of princes to hire a Gentile prophet named Balaam. If he would curse Israel, he would be handsomely rewarded. God told Balaam not to go because Israel was blessed. He told the princes he couldn't go with them because Israel was a protected people. The king sent more princes who had greater status and offered more money. This time God told Balaam he could go but only speak His message. The king was irate when Balaam blessed Israel instead of cursing them. The king offered even more money. Balaam knew he wasn't supposed to go, but that reward sure was tempting. That's the way of Balaam, he wanted the money that was offered. In the Old Testament the donkey speaks to him and an angel rebukes him, but Peter says the donkey rebuked him. In a sense Peter is right because for a moment that a donkey spoke brought Balaam to his senses or as it says in our text restrained his madness. But as you read on in Numbers it didn't last very long because greed is a powerful motivator. Balaam thought he could figure out a way to obey God and still get the money. Instead of cursing them outright he told them how to defeat them so that God would destroy them. Get the commit idolatry and immorality. It was all because of greed.

These false teachers have made it a practice to learn how to milk people out of their money. As we consider missionaries or mission work to support, we do our best to examine those ministries to ensure the funds go to where they say they are going. Folks, be ever so careful in knowing what and who you are giving to when ministers or ministries ask you for money. False teachers are looking for people who can be easily duped into paying for their luxury. It is something they train themselves to do.

The word is translated gymnasium. It speaks of exercise and that's what the false teachers did, exercising their greed.

Here's what William Barclay says: "The picture is a terrible one. The word which is used for trained is the word which is used for an athlete, exercising and training himself for the games. These people have actually trained and equipped and taught their minds and hearts to concentrate on nothing but the forbidden desire. They have deliberately fought with conscience until they have destroyed it; they have deliberately wrestled with God until they have thrown God out of life; they have deliberately struggled with their finer feelings until they have strangled them; they have deliberately trained themselves to concentrate on the forbidden things. Their lives have been a dreadful battle to destroy virtue and to train themselves in the techniques of sin."

Theirs is the fruit of self-indulgence.

Now, I want to say just one word about their followers.

#### C. Their Followers – v. 14 "they seduce the unstable"

The word is used to describe fishermen who use bait to lure and catch fish. James 1:14 uses it to speak about the temptations we face that entice and drag us away. These false teachers look for easy prey to lure away and follow them.

Someone I know who once pastored but has turned to atheism and has made an effort through social media to challenge some old friends who are weak in the faith to question the truth of the Bible. He has even contacted people with whom he did pre-marital counseling to turn them from the faith. He's trying to seduce them with twisted words.

False teachers target those who are spiritually weak and immature in their faith. They know such people can be easily led astray because they are not grounded in the faith.

When it comes to false teachers Peter once again

reminds us about their future.

#### D. Their Future – vs. 13-14

Peter has already spent some time talking about their plight using examples of judgment meted out to angels who had sinned, the world in Noah's day, and Sodom and Gomorrah in Lot's day. He has two more things to say about their future.

##### 1. They will be paid back – v. 13

"They will be paid back for the harm they have done."

Here we see the principle of sowing and reaping. Whatever you plant that's what you harvest. When Jim plants corn he will harvest corn. When he plants soy beans he will reap soy beans. He won't get tomatoes or carrots unless that's what he planted. God is keeping a record of their wrongs piling up and the promise here is that the hard or damage they caused others will be the same kind of harm they can expect to receive. They will be punished.

##### 2. They are cursed – v. 14

"They are an...accursed brood."

John MacArthur notes that these false teachers are "rightly denounced as children of hell's curse."

They will not escape facing God and the wrath He will inflict on them for eternity for their denial and despising Christ, for their blatant sinful conduct and for their willfully, knowingly leading others astray.

False doctrine always leads to false living. How they live and what they teach are tell-tale signs of a false teacher. Be ever so wary.

Let me close with some brief thoughts about how you can tell a faithful teacher from a false teacher.

## II. THE CHARACTER OF FAITHFUL TEACHERS



We can look at faithful teachers in the same way we do false teachers.

We can look at their faith.

We can look at their fruit.

We can look at their followers.

We can look at their future.

Philippians 3:9-20

A good test for a teacher is to see how they live. No they are not perfect but they model Christ as best they can and make an effort to grow in faith. They ought to be leading you to Christ and not away from Him.

I Timothy 3:1-4, 7, 9

We could talk a lot about the faith of a faithful teacher but let me add one more thing. How they live should come out in what they teach. In the first chapter of Romans Paul said he was ready to preach the gospel to them and in chapter 15 he said he had made every effort to fully preach the gospel of Christ.

To the Corinthians he said he would stand in the gospel he preached to them and that his preaching was not with enticing words so that their faith would not rest on man's wisdom but in God's power.

The faithful teacher will have a faith that is seen in his conduct and in his teaching. Both will always point people to Christ.

The evidence is seen in the fruit he produces.

Ephesians 4:11-16

Colossians 1:9-14

The evidence is seen in their followers.

I Corinthians 11:1 "Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ."

Again the whole purpose of His teaching is to produce followers of Christ, people who exhibit godly character in their lives and who grow in faith.

These are a good litmus test for me.

Do I have a faith that is evident in how I live and in what I teach?

Do I have fruit seen in people changing in conduct as they grow in their faith? Are they, are you following after Christ?

Paul's advice to Timothy is advice to be taken by any who would be a faithful teacher.

I Timothy 4:12-13, 15-16 "Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

That's my prayer both for me and for you, that I would be a faithful teacher who models Christ, who loves Christ, who points you to Christ, and who knows he has a future with Christ.

Here is the challenge for all of us from Paul:

I Timothy 6:11-12 "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

The evidence is seen in their future. As Paul said at the end of his life, may it be our desire and testimony as well. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing." (II Timothy 4:7-8)

Will you pray with me that I might be a faithful teacher?